Six Steps: Talking to Kids about Alcohol/Drugs

STEP 1 – "I Care"

Tell your child that you care about him or her. Attempt to build upon your relationship to help reduce the potential defensiveness in your child. An example of this approach is, "*I care about you and I don't want you to get hurt.*"

STEP 2 – "I See"

In this step, you need to tell your child what they have done that has caused you concern. Just give the facts, not your opinion, based upon what you have seen or found. An example is, "*When you came home last night, you were three hours late and smelled like alcohol.*"

STEP 3 – "I Feel"

This is where you tell your child about how this behavior discovery has made you feel. Be sure to take away any blame from this step. For example, "*I am really worried that you might get hurt or killed.*"

STEP 4 – "Listen"

This has to be one of the most important steps. You will need to listen to what the adolescent has to say about their drug use or drinking behaviors. Some may not say anything at all at this point, but it is useful to allow this opportunity for the young person to tell their side. It is possible that your child is not ready to talk. You can tell them that you are available to listen to what they have to say at another time.

STEP 5 – "I Want"

After hearing your child's side, you need to tell them what you want to happen next, and what you want them to do. For example, "*I don't want you to use drugs at all.*" Reinforce that you "want" him or her to continue to see the therapist if the problem does not get better.

STEP 6 – "I Will"

The final step is where you tell your child what you will and will not do in order to help them with this problem. Some may choose to be available to just listen when the young person chooses to discuss the issue. Other parents may choose to make an appointment with a chemical health counselor. The best time to talk is when you have calmed down from the initial shock of learning about your child's use of alcohol or other drugs. You will need to find a place to talk where you cannot be interrupted. The time to talk is not while your child is still under the influence of drinking or using other drugs. If the problem persists, encourage your child to make an appointment with the therapist.